



## Common Core Standards, Professional Texts, and Diverse Learners: A Qualitative Content Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

This research study questioned the degree to which six professional texts guiding implementation of the Common Core Standards in reading address the needs of diverse learners. For the purposes of this research, diverse learners were specifically defined as above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners. The researchers employed qualitative content analysis to determine how and to what level of frequency each text addressed the needs of these particular populations of students. The analysis consisted of a coding system that included how often the specified learners were mentioned, as well as the type of information provided and the format in which it was presented. Findings indicated that each text did show evidence of attention to these student populations though in different ways.

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Professional texts can play a significant role in the development of teacher knowledge and expertise (Huber, 2011). Literacy educators are currently in the midst of a contextual shift with the arrival and adoption of the Common Core Standards (CCS). The CCS serve as a professional text, as do the various emerging works written to guide practicing teachers through the process of implementing it into their curricula and classrooms. It is crucial for professional literacy educators to critically review these texts as they develop their understanding of the CCS and its goals.

Allington (2012) speaks to the ways in which national standards have moved toward a paradigm of “thoughtful literacy” (p. 21). Thoughtful literacy practices, as opposed to a focus only on decoding or recall, involve students thinking deeply and critically about texts and explaining this thinking to an audience. It is imperative for



teachers and education professionals to engage in these practices as well, as response to a sociopolitical climate that questions teacher professionalism through various forms of “teacher blame” (Rubenstein, Heckscher & Adler, 2011) and commercial “quick fix” programs that inherently deny the central role of a quality teacher (Allington & Walmsley, 1995/2007).

The standards themselves echo these sentiments about the need for a high quality teacher who is aware of the specific and unique needs of his or her individual students. For example, under the heading Key Design Considerations: What Is Not Covered by the Standards, the Common Core Standards state: “It is also beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners and for students with special needs” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). Additional language reminds those adopting the standards of the fact that “the Standards set grade-specific standards but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012). With these statements in mind, we set out to investigate whether or not the crop of professional texts that followed in the wake of the standards would provide these intervention methods and materials missing from the CCS itself.

Our content analysis is intended to serve as a demonstration of this crucial aspect of professional practice through examining how supplemental texts can inform the implementation of the CCS for diverse learners. It is intended to be a tool for literacy educators as they engage in their own thoughtful literacy and professional growth around the CCS and diverse learners. This work was guided by the following research question: *How do professional texts address the needs of above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners when presenting information on the Common Core Standards for Reading?*

### **Methodology: How Were The Texts Analyzed?**

We utilized the techniques of qualitative content analysis (QCA) (Neuendorf, 2002; Schreier, 2012) in our review. Hoffman and colleagues (2012) define content analysis as “a flexible research method for analyzing texts and describing and interpreting the written artifacts of a society” (p. 29), and the method was ideally suited to answering our research question. Qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012) begins with defining research questions, follows with selecting material to analyze, and then building a coding frame by reading the material with your question in mind. The coding frame is refined as the material is coded, and the final steps of the process are analysis and interpretation of the data. QCA allowed us to create coding categories deductively and be more responsive to the varied nature of our texts.

### **Choosing Our Texts**

Our content analysis examined professional texts for teachers which focus on implementing the CCS in reading instruction. Similar content analyses have been conducted with a focus on basal reading programs (Pilonieta, 2010; Witt, 1996) and social studies textbooks (Neumann, 2012).

To find appropriate texts, we turned to well-known publishers in the field: the International Reading Association, NCTE, and Heinemann. We also searched for



relevant works in OCLC's WorldCat database and Amazon.com. While our initial research indicated that several publishers included "correlations and crosswalks" (i.e. Heinemann) for previously published texts, our study focused on texts specifically created to help teachers adapt instruction to meet the new standards. As we describe in our introduction, it seemed important to evaluate texts written about the CCS since these newly created texts are guiding the vision for the CCS as implementation moves forward.

Text selection occurred between September 2012 and January 2013. The following six texts were chosen for our study:

Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., & Lehman, C. (2012). *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating achievement*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2013). *Common Core English language arts in a PLC at work, grades 3-5*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Long, S., Hutchinson, W., & Neiderhiser, J. (2011). *Supporting students in a time of core standards: English language arts, grades prek-2*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

McLaughlin, M., & Overturf, B. J. (2013). *The Common Core: Teaching K-5 students to meet the reading standards*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Morrow, L. M., Shanahan, T., & Wixson, K. K. (Eds.) (2013). *Teaching with the Common Core standards for English language arts, preK-2*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Owocki, G. (2012). *The Common Core lesson book, K-5: Working with increasingly complex literature, informational text, and foundational reading skills*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

We selected works specifically on the reading standards as well as those encompassing all ELA standards, agreeing to only include chapters on the reading standards, the introduction, and the conclusion in our analysis. When considering volumes in a series (*Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work*, *Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts*, and *Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts*), we included one representative text.

### **The Coding Frame and Units of Coding**

For the purposes of this research and following from the CCS, diverse learners were specifically defined as above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners. In the development of these categories, we as researchers were often reminded of the ways in which language serves as both an instrument of empowerment and of limitation. Lightfoot (2004) acknowledges this tension in a piece that examines the term "parental involvement," decodes its many meanings, and reminds educators to be cognizant of their linguistic contributions to problematic deficit discourses:

Our discursive, or language-based, understandings not only result from, but also create, material conditions. In this case, the way we use words to understand various people, and the way they are expected to behave, may, in itself, shape that behavior, and certainly



creates differential understandings of various groups of people.  
(p.94)

In this same vein, we acknowledge that the term “diverse learners” is more complex than the parameters by which we have defined it for the purposes of this study. We also reject its inherent implication that there is one ideal mold or prototype of learner from which all others divert. However, as is the case with the CCS itself and the professional texts in our analysis, we are limited by our language use. That said, we do use this specific language in order to recognize the significant bodies of research dedicated to unpacking and ultimately meeting the unique learning needs of the three subgroups we have named. For this reason, and in order to maintain focus on our research question, we limited our count to specific references to “English learner,” “above grade level reader,” and “below grade level reader.” Consequently, we excluded terms referring to other distinct subgroups such as “students with special needs” and umbrella terms such as “at risk.”

Similarly, we recognize limitations to use of the terms “English learner,” “above grade learner,” and “below grade level learner.” We understand that these terms may imply a lack of understanding of the multiplicity and hybridity of student identities (Nieto & Bode, 2012). For example, any English learner or above grade level learner will also be a member of a particular socioeconomic class or racial/ethnic group. Though we acknowledge the intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) of social identities, we focused our study on the groups identified in the CCS.

Each book was read by two readers. We marked every mention of English learner, above grade level learner, below grade level learner, and any combination, and divided the text into discrete thought units. We defined a thought unit as a unit of text that communicated a single thought. For example, in *The Common Core Lesson Book K-5* (2012) Owocki gives the following suggestions specifically for teaching English learners in her text box on interpreting images:

- Use the illustrations to name and discuss specific vocabulary relevant to the text.
- Work with students to use small (one-half-by-two-inch) sticky notes to label key parts of the illustrations that will appear in the written text and to show the connection between the images and the text.
- Use transparency tape to highlight a few key words or phrases, and discuss their meanings before reading. Show the connections between the words/phrases and the illustrations. (p. 263)

Each bullet gives a distinct instructional strategy or thought and was therefore coded as a separate thought unit. We also counted the total words in each thought unit. We examined patterns in the references to identified learners and created additional categories for coding. We noted that information was shared in three formats: prose, informational text features such as charts and graphs, and vignettes or narratives about teaching.

Additionally we determined six types of information were provided about the CCS and our target learners. Each identified thought unit was given one code for type of information. Table 1 illustrates this coding of units.



Some text units were coded as “educational policy” because they made direct references to educational policy documents including the Common Core Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012) and the Publishers’ Criteria (corestandards.org, 2013). Text units coded as “educational research” referred to educational research studies that related to the targeted students. Another type of text unit was coded as “diversity” and this was text that served as a general reminder for teachers to consider the diverse needs of our targeted learners when implementing the CCS.

The focus in instruction text units was on classroom application, and some authors provided references to research to bolster the instructional strategy (coded as “instruction with research”), while others provided the strategy without a direct reference to research (“instruction”). We adopted a broad definition of instruction informed by Danielson’s (2007) “Domain 1: Planning and preparation, Component 1e: Designing coherent instruction.” In this component of Danielson’s framework are the following elements: “learning activities, instructional materials and resources, instructional groups, lesson and unit structure” (p. 60). We coded thought units as “instruction” or “instruction with research” if the thought unit referred to one of these elements.

Table 1: Types of information units of coding

Type of information	Description	Example
Educational policy	Connection to CCLS policy documents	“NGA and CCSSO acknowledge that students acquiring English require supports...[continues and refers to specific ELL policy document] (Fisher & Frey, 2013, p. 23).”
Educational research	Connection to educational research study	“Evidence for particular assumptions regarding text complexity within the CCSS is sparse, and in some cases, nonexistent...[continue to share research evidence] (Pearson & Hiebert in Morrow et al, 2013, p. 11).”
Diversity	Reminder of need to consider diversity of learners when implementing CCSS	“And remember, even the phrase ‘written at the fifth-grade level’ means that such a text is appropriate for the average fifth-grade reader, so almost half of fifth graders are likely reading below that level (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012, p. 90)!”
Instruction with research	Connection to educational research study and specific teaching strategy described	“English learners benefit when teachers do the following (Echevarria 2006): write the new vocabulary word so that students have a visual reference (Owocki, 2012, p. 213).”
Instruction	Description of specific instructional	“When engaging Jamal in learning, Mrs. Downing is careful to use a variety of instructional settings, including small group and paired. Jamal seems more



strategies	comfortable responding in smaller settings (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2013, p. 57)."
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Table 1: Types of information units of coding

After creating our initial categories and segmenting our texts into units, we conducted a trial run of our frame. A finalized frame was created from this rereading. An annotated version is in Table 2.

### Analysis

Each book was coded independently by two researchers to ensure reliability of the coding (Schreier, 2012). After coding the sections independently, the researchers resolved discrepancies through discussion. Following the coding process, Excel was used to calculate frequencies and illustrate patterns. The researchers collaboratively reviewed the coded units as well to examine trends within each text and across texts.

Table 2: Coding frame

Category	Subcategories description
Coder	Researcher 1, Researcher 2, Researcher 3
Book title	6 sample titles
Page and paragraph	Units were identified by page and paragraph. Units were segmented by thought units—when the meaning changed, one segment ended and the next began.
Word Count	In counting words we were guided by the following: “A word is defined by Works as any set of characters that are separated by a space from another word. Words separated by hyphens, periods, or any other punctuation mark are counted as one word” (Microsoft, 2012).
Learner	English learner, above grade level reader, below grade level reader, or any combination
Type of text	Expository prose, informational text feature such as a chart or list, vignette or narrative about teaching
Information provided	Educational policy, educational research, instruction with research, instruction, and diversity



Table 2: Coding frame

**Looking Across Texts: What Are the Overall Trends?**

In examining the six texts by type of learner, text type, and information provided, it is evident that more of the information provided was about the needs of English learners (ELs). Perhaps this reflects a recognition of changing demographics and the demonstrated need for teachers to differentiate instruction for ELs (Gersten et al., 2007). Also to be considered, however, is the clear identification of these learners in our texts; authors specified when they were talking about ELs, but sometimes implied more generally how to address the needs of others (which wouldn't be counted). The texts had 125 units referring to ELs out of 197 units about our identified learners. Figure 1 demonstrates the coverage of the texts.

Figure 1: Coverage of diverse learners in texts

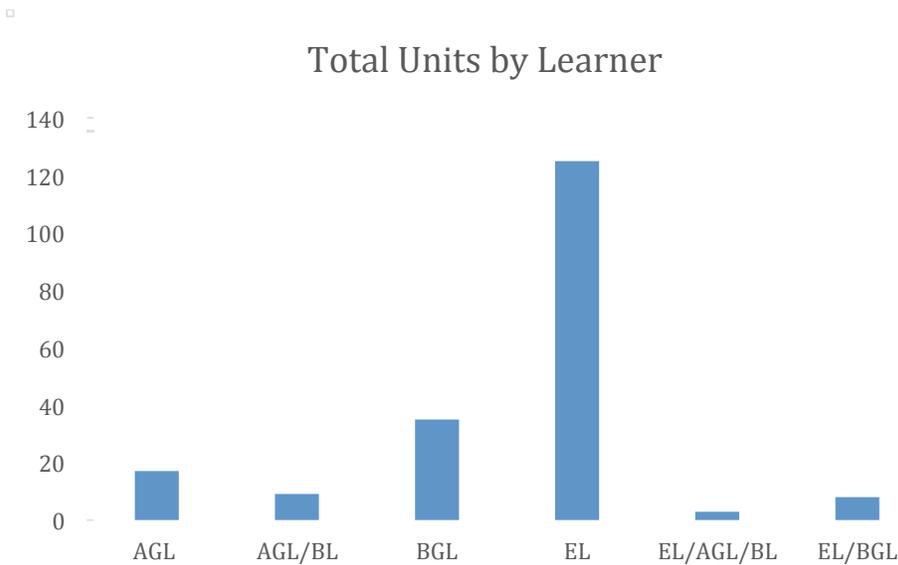


Figure 1: Coverage of diverse learners in texts

The texts did have a more even presentation of text types with 76 units in informational text features, 69 in prose, and 53 in vignettes. In what might not be surprising in books targeted for practitioners there was an emphasis on sharing instructional information with readers. 152 of 197 total units were coded as instruction (91 units) or instruction with research (61 units). Figure 2 demonstrates this finding. Figure 2

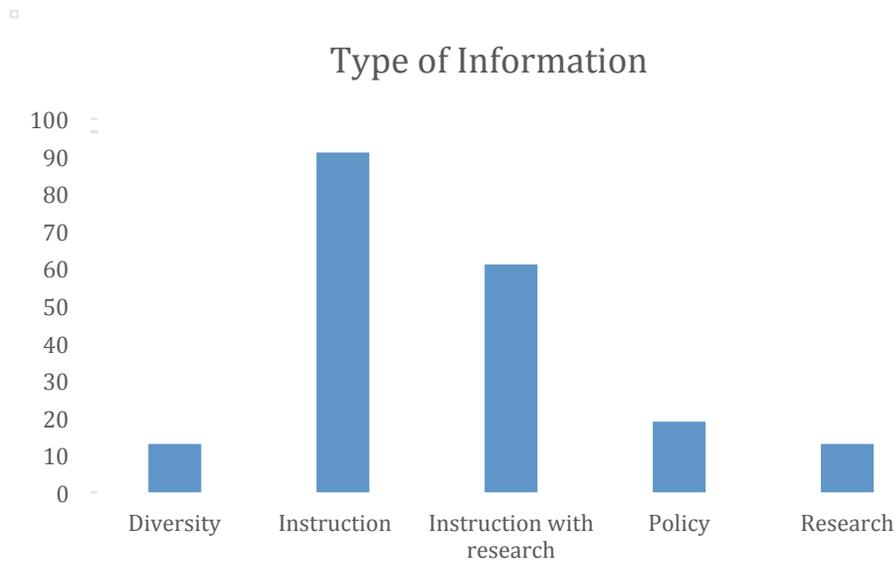


Figure 2: Thought units of information in texts

Reflecting on our research question and looking across all six books we can say that these texts do provide educators with information on how to teach above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners in a range of text types. Teachers looking for information explicitly about English learners may find these texts especially helpful.

### **Findings For Each Text: How Did Each Text Address the Needs of Diverse Learners?**

In this section, we describe analysis at the level of the book to show how each text addresses the needs of diverse learners. Reviewing the data for each of the books, we see that while all of the authors recognize the need to address the needs of diverse learners, the emphasis on this topic within the text varies. Figure 3 demonstrates the coverage of diverse learners within each text.

Figure 3

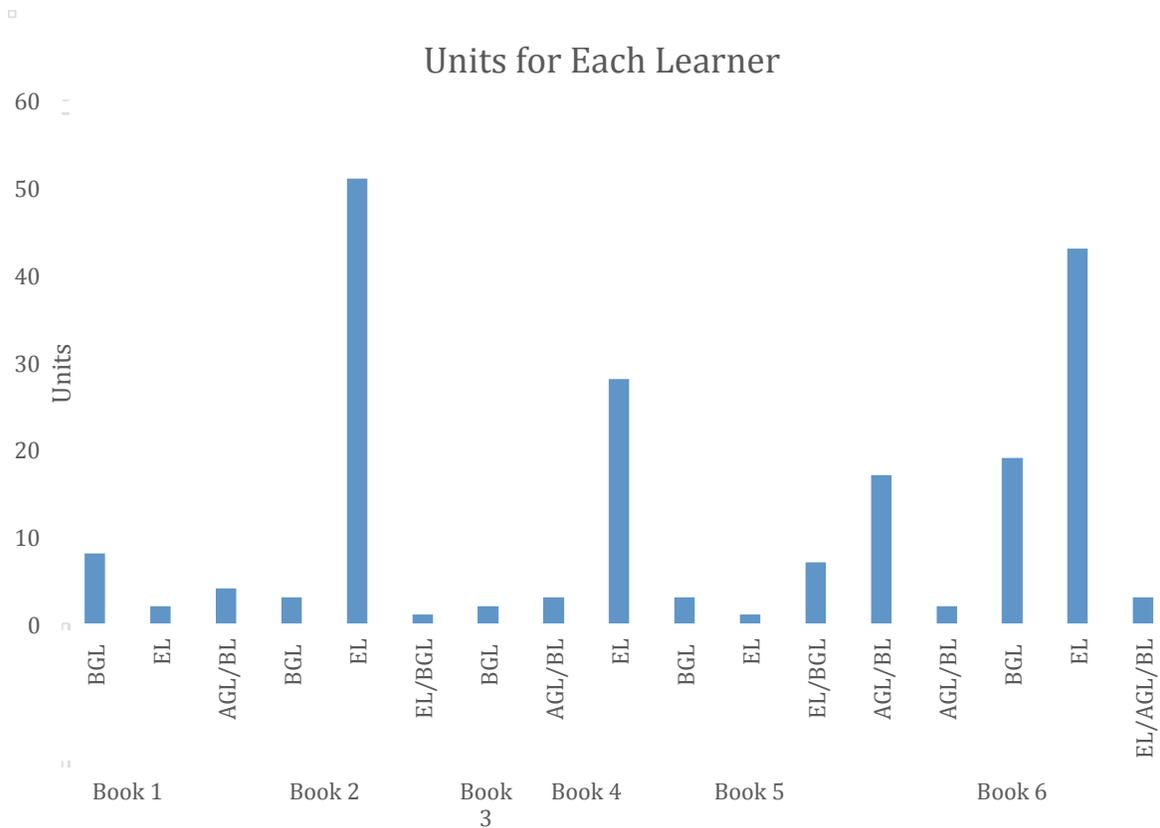


Figure 3: Thought units by Book and Learner

Book 1: *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Grades 3-5*

Book 2: *The Common Core Lesson Book, K-5*

Book 3: *Pathways to the Common Core*

Book 4: *Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts, Grades PreK-2*

Book 5: *Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, PreK-2*

Book 6: *The Common Core: Teaching K-5 Students to Meet the Reading Standards*

### ***Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work: Grades 3-5***

Drawing on the Professional Learning Community (PLC) literature, Fisher and Frey (2013) write about how to implement the CCS within this type of professional development group, and teachers working in collaborative groups will find this text particularly useful. The text has many suggestions such as charts and discussion guides to facilitate collaboration within and across grade levels. Our analysis of this text was limited to Chapter 1: Using Collaborative Teams for English Language Arts and Chapter 2: Implementing the Common Core State Standards for Reading as the remaining chapters go beyond our focus on reading instruction. Table 3 summarizes the coverage of the text by learner type, type of information, word count, and thought unit.

Table 3

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Word count</b>	<b>Thought Unit</b>
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<b>Total</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Below grade level</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>8</b>
Prose	417	8
Policy	64	2
Instruction with research	106	3
Instruction	247	3
<b>English learner</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>2</b>
Prose	76	1
Policy	76	1
Vignette	44	1
Instruction	44	1

Table 3: *Common Core English Language Arts in a PLC at Work, Grades 3-5*

Despite our limited review of this book, the authors do address the needs of English learners (2 units) and below grade level learners (8 units), with the preponderance of the information being presented through prose (9 units). The majority of the information shared is instruction or instruction with research (7 out of 10 units). The following section of the text was illustrative of the kinds of information shared in the chapter on reading: “For students who struggle with reading, this means that they must be taught with complex texts and asked to read increasingly complex texts across the year. However, it is important to note that the text alone should not be the only scaffold; instruction is critical for these students to progress and accelerate” (p. 32).

While this text does share some information about English learners and below grade level learners, the focus of the text is on the PLC and facilitating conversations with group members. Diverse learners are addressed within this framework, and it would be expected that through reflection and discussion teachers would identify the best way to meet the needs of their own diverse learners. Resources are available for free downloading here: <http://go.solution-tree.com/commoncore/> and would be helpful for any teacher working with the CCS. Overall the text will be most helpful for teachers working to address CCS curriculum with school colleagues.

### ***The Common Core Lesson Book K-5***

Gretchen Owocki (2012) writes a practical guide to each of the anchor standards for reading, showing how the standard could be addressed through a gradual release of responsibility model and including suggestions on how to provide additional instruction for students who have difficulty. Our analysis included the whole book. There were 59 thought units regarding diverse learners as defined by our study, with 51 of those pertaining to English learners. Most of the information was presented in an information feature (41 out of 59 units, all of which pertained to English learners) and the rest in prose. Similarly, instruction or instruction with research account for the majority (50 out of 59 units) of the information shared. Table 4 summarizes the data for this book.

Table 4

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Word count</b>	<b>Thought unit</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2105</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Above grade level and below grade level</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>4</b>



Prose	267	4
Diversity	267	4
<b>Below grade level</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>3</b>
Prose	135	3
Diversity	79	2
Research	56	1
<b>English learner</b>	<b>1665</b>	<b>51</b>
Informational text feature	1401	41
Research	68	2
Instruction with research	700	19
Instruction	633	20
Prose	264	10
Instruction	264	10
<b>English learner and below grade level</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>1</b>
Prose	38	1
Instruction	38	1

Table 4: *The Common Core Lesson Book, K-5*

Looking purely at the data suggests that educators wanting to support English learners will find this text more useful than those looking for strategies to teach above grade level and below grade students. However, as mentioned in the book’s overview, the work “is designed to support differentiated instruction” with teaching strategies provided for the K-5 range collectively rather than one grade level at a time (p. xxi). The K-5 charts and intensified instruction ideas offered for each anchor standard mean that there are helpful suggestions for those working with above grade level and below grade level students, even if they are not counted in this study.

In addition, it should be noted that the large number of English learner instruction strategies counted does not necessarily indicate an equal number of unique strategies being offered. Because the text is designed with chapters and sections that can be read alone, suggestions for working with English learners are sprinkled throughout the book and strategies are repeated as appropriate. The most common strategy suggested is to “pair English learners with experienced English speakers” (p. 16) during an activity, which accounts for 9 out of 30 English learner teaching strategies presented. Still, with 51 references to English learners and a design that facilitates differentiated instruction, educators will find many useful teaching strategies for working with English learners, above grade level learners, and below grade level learners within this text. Owocki’s spiral-bound volume is recommended for any teacher looking for multiple lesson plan ideas, including reproducible graphic organizers, targeted at each of the Common Core Standards in reading.

### ***The Common Core: Teaching K-5 Students to Meet the Reading Standards***

With this text, McLaughlin and Overturf (2013) present an overview of the CCS and practical ideas for implementation while arguing that research based best practices should continue to be used to teach reading even when not explicitly mentioned in the standards. While our analysis was of the entire book, all but 2 thought units were found in the thematic chapter “English Learners, Students with Disabilities, Gifted and Talented Learners, and the Common Core.” The authors give equal consideration to each type of



diverse learner – exploring what is known about them, making connections to the CCS, and offering possible instructional considerations for each one. However, for our study about half the thought units (43 out of 84) were coded as pertaining to English learners; the rest are divided almost evenly between above grade level readers (17 out of 84) and below grade level readers (19 out of 84). Table 5 demonstrates the findings for this book.

Instruction and instruction with research account for most of the information presented on diverse learners (64 out of 84), with a complement of policy statements (13 units), a few references to educational research (5 units), and a couple of broad diversity statements (2 units).

Text type seems balanced among information features (25 units), prose (25 units), and vignettes (34 units). The following example illustrates instructional strategies for an English learner, Jamal, shared within a vignette: “When engaging Jamal in learning, Mrs. Downing is careful to use a variety of instructional settings, including small group and paired. Jamal seems more comfortable responding in smaller settings. His teacher is also aware that supports, such as pictures, wait time, and short written responses, work well for him” (p.57).

McLaughlin and Overturf’s text may appeal most to educators new to the Common Core, especially the chapters that guide readers through each College and Career Readiness (CCR) Reading Anchor Standard. Each chapter explains how CCS standards build to meet the CCR Reading Anchor Standard, offering literacy skills and strategies to support the reading standard. However, the chapter on diverse learners referenced above can be read on its own and should be of interest to all teachers.

Table 5

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Word count</b>	<b>Thought unit</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2286</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Above grade level</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>17</b>
Informational text feature	68	7
Instruction with research	68	7
Prose	442	8
Policy	401	2
Instruction with research	41	6
Vignette	36	2
Instruction	36	2
<b>Above grade level and below grade level</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>2</b>



Informational text feature	70	1
Policy	70	1
Prose	92	1
Policy	92	1
<b>Below grade level</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>19</b>
Vignette	456	19
Instruction with research	456	19
<b>English learner</b>	<b>959</b>	<b>43</b>
Informational text feature	290	17
Policy	159	7
Instruction	131	10
Prose	463	13
Educational research	221	5
Policy	79	1
Instruction	163	7
Vignette	206	13
Instruction with research	19	2
Instruction	187	11
<b>English learner, above grade level, and below grade level</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>3</b>
Prose	163	3
Diversity	113	2
Policy	50	1

Table 5: *The Common Core: Teaching K-5 Students to Meet the Reading Standards****Pathways to the Common Core***

This text, written by Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth, and Christopher Lehman (2012), is intended to provide readers with support in understanding the development and design of the CCS in order to best implement it in classrooms. The authors walk the reader through the language of the literacy standards step by step, including classroom examples and scenarios along the way. In providing examples, it is clear that they are used by the authors to better illustrate a point and show the CCS in practice in a particular context rather than being prescriptive to all teachers. The centrality of the teacher's role and ability to adapt the standards specifically to his or her students was reiterated throughout the volume. Also the way the authors offer suggestions, yet refrain from using language that would imply that these suggestions would work for every classroom, keeps with this theme. Our analysis focused on the introduction, conclusion and the chapters on the reading standards (2-5), and Table 6 summarizes the data for this book.

Table 6

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Word count</b>	<b>Thought unit</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Below grade level</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>2</b>
Prose	150	2
Diversity	36	1
Instruction	114	1

Table 6: *Pathways to the Common Core*

In looking simply at the data above, decontextualized from the text itself, it could be easily gathered that this book would not be particularly helpful to teachers looking for instructional strategies, particularly those pertaining to students reading above grade level or those learning English. In applying our coding system and criteria, there are only two thought units in the entire text that speak explicitly to students struggling to read texts that have been matched to their grade level. The authors clearly explain in the introductory chapter that they have intentionally chosen to “tuck research and tips into each chapter where each seems appropriate and don’t repeat that research and those tips in other chapters” (p.21). That said, there are many implicit and repeated references to the importance of teachers knowing the individual strengths and needs of each student in order to best integrate the Common Core into their practice.

In conclusion, this text is best suited to readers who are seeking a guiding text to lead them through their own process of examining the language of the CCS and bringing these new understandings to their classroom instruction, without abandoning the solid, evidence-based, literacy teaching practices that they already know to be effective with their students. The authors strongly suggest that this examination and exploration of the CCS be a collaborative one among teacher colleagues in order for implementation efforts to be more effective and consistent.

***Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts PreK-2***

Susi Long and her co-authors (2011) underscore the importance of marrying the CCS with teachers’ existing knowledge of best practices, with particular regard to valuing students’ rich and diverse languages and literacies and making them a core element of curriculum and instruction. Long and colleagues invite us into the classrooms of exemplary teachers who are employing culturally responsive pedagogy in ways that meet the demands of the CCS. Relying on a balance of vignettes (11 units), prose (10 units), and informational text features (10 units), the authors make specific references to particular concerns that may arise for teachers regarding English learners and those falling above or below grade level in measurements of reading ability. We analyzed the entire book, and Table 7 demonstrates the findings for this book.

Table 7

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Word count</b>	<b>Thought unit</b>
Total	<b>2749</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Above grade level and below grade level</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>3</b>
Prose	171	1
Diversity	171	1
Vignette	90	2
Diversity	90	2
<b>English learner</b>	<b>2488</b>	<b>28</b>
Informational text feature	371	10



	Instruction with research	92	1
	Instruction	279	9
Prose		1057	9
	Diversity	31	1
	Educational research	235	2
	Policy	123	1
	Instruction with research	561	4
	Instruction	107	1
Vignette		1060	9
	Instruction	1060	9

Table 7: *Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts PreK-2*

As is seen in the data above, 28 out of 31 of the thought units are in regards to English learners. The classrooms that are featured in the text describe the work of culturally and linguistically diverse students and teachers, showing the readers different combinations of instruction and assessment that have proven effective in these particular contexts. This book shares these victories with the reader not as a map or blueprint with specific instructions, but shows how individual teachers made the CCS work for their students and classrooms from year to year. This text, through vivid classroom portraits, explicitly and assertively reminds readers that teachers do not have to throw away what they know to be best practice or an effective strategy that meets an individual student’s needs in order to make room for the Common Core. Early in the text, the authors state, “in a nutshell, we write to remind every educator that inspirational and innovative teaching in a time of standards is not only possible, but essential” (p. 6). The remainder of the text provides evidence of the “possible,” by extracting instructional practices from the featured classrooms and showing alignment with CCS and NCTE standards in charts at the end of each chapter.

The authors demonstrate that culturally responsive pedagogy and assessment can and should co-exist peacefully with the CCS. For this reason, this text will appeal most to preservice and practicing teachers seeking specific examples of teachers taking their own unique paths to meet the CCS, and more specifically, paths that are deeply grounded in the unique needs of their particular learners. This text does not read as prescriptive, but rather as a powerful reminder to readers to begin with what they know – namely, their students.

### ***Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts PreK-2***

In this edited volume, Morrow, Shanahan, and Wixson (2013) bring together leaders in the literacy field to reflect upon each of the areas of the CCS. Our review examined the introduction and concluding chapters as well as the chapters on comprehension, informational text, and foundational skills. Findings are shown in Table 8.

Table 8



<b>Coding</b>	<b>Word count</b>	<b>Thought unit</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1306</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Below grade level</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>3</b>
Prose	400	3
Educational research	310	2
Policy	90	1
<b>English learner</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>
Prose	19	1
Policy	19	1
<b>English learner and below grade level</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>7</b>
Vignette	887	7
Educational research	13	1
Instruction	874	6

Table 8: *Teaching with the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, PreK-2*

The authors discuss the needs of below grade level readers and English learners in these sections. The text reports significantly on policy and educational research related to the CCS (5 out of 11 units). For example, in writing about text complexity in Chapter 1, Pearson and Hiebert note that, “Evidence for particular assumptions regarding text complexity within the CCS is sparse, and in some cases nonexistent” (p. 11), and they follow this introductory sentence with research to back up this claim. In addition to the research and policy information, 1 long vignette addresses English learners and below grade level learners and includes instructional suggestions (887 words, 6 instruction units, 1 educational research unit).

The editors of this text suggest that their aim is to address the question, “How should these standards be put into practice for daily instruction?” (xi). Our review of this text demonstrates that they attempt to answer this question for diverse learners with policy and research references as well as vignettes of classroom teaching. As an edited volume written by literacy leaders for a professional audience, this text is best suited for graduate classes and experienced teachers. While some chapters have introductory information, most chapters are written for an academic audience.

## Reflections

### The Value of Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) allowed us to examine these texts methodically and purposefully as we worked to answer our research question. QCA allowed us to build our research question and coding frame from the texts themselves allowing for a more valid representation of the content of the texts. Word count was a concrete measure of overall coverage of the topic, while thought units allowed us to count the specific strategies and connections made in the text.

QCA also required us to focus narrowly on our research question and examine the coverage of students who are above grade level learner, below grade level learner, and English learners. Left out of our analysis were more general references to differentiation. As mentioned previously, readers may find this narrow lens both illuminating and



limiting. On the one hand, we identified very specifically references to the identified learners. On the other hand, readers could argue that the reviewed texts address the learners more generally across the book.

### **Addressing the Needs of Diverse Learners**

For this project we asked: *How do professional texts address the needs of above grade level readers, below grade level readers, and English learners when presenting information on the Common Core Standards for Reading?* Overall we found that all of the authors demonstrated their understanding that teachers need to address the needs of diverse learners in elementary classrooms, but the emphasis varied when applying the framework of our three coding categories. English learners were most referenced and above grade level learners were only addressed extensively in one text. All texts addressed below grade level learners in some way. The information was shared almost evenly in prose, informational text features, and vignettes. The texts mostly focused on instruction and ways teachers could meet the standards.

We recognize limitations to our coding criteria that may have influenced our results, particularly the prominence of references to English learners as opposed to references to above or below grade level learners. For example, many authors made broad and frequent references to “students” that may have implied student differences without using the specific terminology required by our criteria. As mentioned in our description of the development of our coding categories, we acknowledge both the importance and restrictions of the language used to define diversity and to describe diverse learners in the CCS, the professional texts we have examined, and this piece itself. We promote an examination of language use that recognizes these limitations, but also takes into account the ways language can provide information and introduce effective research-based strategies to preservice and practicing teachers who comprise the readership of these texts.

Predictable for texts for practicing educators, the majority of the information shared in the texts was coded as instruction or instruction with research. The texts varied in their approaches to the content, ranging from providing concrete instructional suggestions to emphasizing the need for teachers to discuss the CCS collaboratively as professionals. The texts could be used by novice educators just beginning their career and more experienced educators who are looking to refine their practice as they implement the CCS.

Though the format and frequency of the discussion of diverse learners as defined by our coding categories varied from text to text, there were shared perspectives on the integration of the CCS into classroom instruction. Teachers were encouraged to continue to use what they already know within the context of past research and practice. Further, readers were reminded that the CCS will be most effective and successful if implemented in a way that centralizes teacher knowledge and does not promote the translation of the standards into a scripted curriculum. None of the texts emphasized a packaged program for addressing the needs of students, including diverse learners.

### **Capturing the “Shift”**

The texts in this review represent the knowledge of literacy professionals at the beginning of the shift to the CCS. As we complete this review, we want to acknowledge



that additional texts are being written and published to address questions about the CCS and diverse learners. For example, we are currently utilizing in our literacy methods classes *The Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner* series (Dove and Honigsfeld, 2013; Honigsfeld and Dove, 2013) which was published after our review was completed. However, the texts in this review are still useful for teachers as they work towards the goals of the CCS. As suggested by the authors of the texts we've reviewed, teachers will need to have continual conversations about how to best meet the needs of diverse learners and the CCS. These professional texts can be part of the conversation since the texts describe the current status of educational research and policy and demonstrate best practice teaching for the CCS. Furthermore, all of the texts echo Long and colleagues (2011) who urge teachers to have "high expectations for students" but not to "equate those expectations with *standardization* or one-size-fits-all views of teaching and learning" (p. 50). The professional texts described in this review help teachers achieve these expectations through differentiated instruction aligned with the Common Core Standards.

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